

# New Lab Seeks Reproductive Secrets

A sparkling new laboratory at A&M University is quietly probing some of nature's most complex secrets—the reproductive processes of farm animals.

The facility is the Animal Husbandry's Department of Physiology of Reproduction Laboratory, which

is devoted to a better understanding of livestock fertility.

Heading the lab is Dr. A. M. Sorensen, who believes the unit is outstanding among those found at agricultural schools.

THE LABORATORY is housed in a completely remodeled, air-

conditioned building which once was A&M's milk test building just west of the campus. Remodeling funds came partly from a \$30,000 National Science Foundation grant, matched by a like amount from the university.

In the structure's 4,800 square feet of usable floor space are a wide variety of scientific equipment, graduate student facilities, offices, animal stalls and an operating room. Sorensen and Dr. J. T. Morrow, assistant professor of animal husbandry, are especially proud of three electronic units for radio isotope work.

THE EQUIPMENT includes a decade scaler, proportional counter and converter, and scintillation detector, all of which work together to count potency of radioactive materials.

All these facilities can be seen at an open house to be held 1-5 p.m. Oct. 11.

The Department of Animal Husbandry has pioneered fertility studies in Texas. Some of these findings have found practical application on farms and ranches.

Fertility testing of bulls, for

example, is practiced by many progressive cattlemen. The system is based on semen evaluation. Another program to come out of the experiments is pregnancy diagnosis of cows, an accurate method of culling out leafer animals.

SORENSEN SAID there are a number of research projects underway in the lab which will someday help fertility problems in all types of livestock.

To name of few, there is in vitro (outside) fertilization of ova (egg) of cows. Ova will be taken from a cow and fertilized in the laboratory to get planned matings, or pre-planned heredity. Then the ova will be frozen and stored for future use. The system could be called an ova bank.

Later, one fertilized ova can be placed in a healthy cow, and the calf will bear the characteristics of the sire and the original dam.

ANOTHER PROGRAM is an overall study of cattle fertility. Groups of animals with known fertility are sacrificed to see if there is any relationship between fertility and tissue cells, conception, blood calcium, blood phosphorus,

albumin and thyroid activity.

There also is a study underway to measure relationship between thyroid activity and fertility based on radio isotope measurement. Sorensen pointed out. The system gauges thyroid in the blood serum without injecting any radioactive material into the live animal.

One of the most significant research projects is known as synchronization of estrus. Sorensen says it will definitely have practical application when worked out.

This involves bringing cows into heat all at one time to make artificial breeding more efficient. The result could be concentration of labor and calf crops at one season.

SORENSEN is the first to admit that the science of reproduction physiology has only been dented by researchers.

"There are a lot of things we don't know," he said. "We haven't dug into this area nearly as long as we have in animal nutrition and management. We know what happens many times but not always why."

Answering those "why" is the objective of the laboratory.



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